

HENRY, JOSEPH

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CONTEMPORANIES

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# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Joseph Henry

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Smithsonian Inst. Archives  
Ru 7001: Joseph Henry Collection  
Box 9

Davis to Henry, 2/4/48

Smithsonian Institution  
24 Feb. 1848

My dear Sir,  
In accordance with  
the intention of yours of the 2nd inst.  
I would say Monday evening, and the  
next morning more convenient to  
you will be most happy to see you  
and also to learn that early, and please  
attend the affairs of the Smithsonian Institute  
Very truly yrs.  
Wm. F. Wallcut

16 MARCH 1851

ALS (Corcoran Papers, DLC).

<sup>1</sup> Immediately after the second session of the Thirty-first Congress adjourned on March 4, the Senate reconvened in a called session lasting until March 13. Traveling by way of Louisville, Davis reached Brierfield on March 26. After a brief stay, he continued downriver to New Orleans, where he visited his in-laws and conducted personal business, leaving there by April 7 (Jackson *Mississippian*, Mar. 28, 1851; New Orleans *Picayune*, Mar. 29, 1851; New Orleans *Delta*, Apr. 1, 1851; account with Payne & Harrison, [Jan. 26, 1852]; Margaret K. Howell to V. Davis, Apr. 7, 1851, Z790f, Howell Papers, Ms-Ar).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing (1815–52), New York landscape designer and architect, was an influential author and editor of *The Horticulturist* (DAB). At the suggestion of the Smithsonian trustees and “several prominent citizens of Washington,” undoubtedly including Corcoran, Downing was officially engaged by Millard Fillmore in April 1851 to plan and supervise improvement of the Mall under provisions of an appropriations bill enacted on March 3. His plan was shown to the Smithsonian regents on February 27 (Proctor, “Death of Downing,” *Columbia Hist. Recs.*, 27:251–52; Cohen,

*Business and Politics*, 101, 222; Downing, *Rural Essays*, xlvii; U.S. Statutes at Large, 9:613; Senate Misc. Doc. 1, 32:called sess., 72).

<sup>3</sup> Davis served on the House select committee on the Smithsonian, 1846–46, was appointed a regent in 1847, and in 1850 became chairman of the building committee considering a “general plan” to improve the Mall. Also closely connected with the Smithsonian and the Mall beautification project, Corcoran was particularly interested in Downing’s ideas (Davis Papers, 2:197, 3:263n; Senate Misc. Doc. 120, 31:1, 49, 52–55; Cohen, *Business and Politics*, 222).

<sup>4</sup> Before Downing’s plan was implemented, the Mall was described as “a large common . . . presenting a surface of yellow or white clay, cut into by deep gullies, and without trees except one or two scraggy and dying sycamores.” According to Davis, Downing envisioned transforming the area “into an extended landscape garden, to be traversed in different directions by gravelled walks and carriage drives.” The work proceeded from May 1851 until the spring of 1853, when the appropriations were exhausted (Proctor, “Death of Downing,” *Columbia Hist. Recs.*, 27:250–53; Davis et al. report, [Jan. 10], 1851).

To Joseph Henry

S. Boat on, Missi. River.  
25th March 1851

My DEAR PROF.

Mr. M. W. Phillips a planter and a writer on agricultural matters wrote to me a letter<sup>1</sup> which I have read on the way home and find to contain a reference to yourself, thus “A year or so ago Mr. Henry Secty. of the Smithsonian Institution requested me to act as one of the colaborers in taking notes on Meteorology. My answer was, in substance that I would do so cheerfully if put in possession of an accurate set of implements, which I preferred to pay for at



25 MARCH 1851

thus I could keep them. He replied that I should have a set & they were ordered. Since then I have heard no more".<sup>2</sup> XXX<sup>3</sup> He says you wrote him that the instruments would cost about thirty dollars, and adds that to the usual inquiries he wishes to attach observations on "the relative quantity of moisture in the atmosphere, the electricity & if any electrical currents. There are such things as Hygrometers, Wind gauge atmometers (this latter is to show evaporation in a given tim[e]<sup>4</sup> &c. &c." XXXX "and that you will request Mr. Henry to have *two sets* made - one for myself, the other for Dr. George Banks<sup>5</sup> of Clinton, he says he will pay for them and requested me to write." XXXX "We can pay so soon as we know cost - we only require to ensure their safe delivery, as such things are often packed so clumsily, they break. If they are worth it & cost ~~for~~ we do not object. We do not want fancy stock, nor would we have things as rough as the savage - the happy medium, the best of instruments, though not made for show."

I have omitted the *verbose* parts, and now, behold! When I return will you let me see your shop for the manufacture of stock "fancy, savage or happy medium" according to order. This man who would write more than one private secretary could read, may nevertheless if you want such observations as he proposes answer your purpose & I have no doubt both he and Dr. Bancks will pay for the instruments as <-proposed-> /stated/, if you choose to send them. His letter was dated Jany 21st 1851, & seems to have been too heavy for speedy transmission as well as early perusal.

Accept my best wishes and believe me as ever your friend

JEFFN. DAVIS

P.S. Address of M. W. Phillips is Edwards Depot Hinds County Miss<sup>6</sup>

ALS (DNA, RG27, Meteorological Corres., Is Recd., Smithsonian).

<sup>1</sup> Martin Wilson Phillips (1806-89), native of South Carolina, physician, and noted agricultural leader, migrated in 1810 to Hinds County, where he established Log Hall, a model farm. His friendship with Davis spanned more than fifty years (Bozeman, "Martin W. Phillips," 1-23; Gray, *Hist. Agric.*, 2:781-82; Davis to Phillips, Nov. 24, 1887, Davis Letters, Wood-

son Research Center, TxHR). Phillips' letter of January 21, 1851, has not been found.

<sup>2</sup> In April 1849 Phillips wrote to Henry, offering to make meteorological observations for the Smithsonian, a proposal apparently accepted, since on May 2 Phillips wrote again to request a set of instruments. According to Henry, so many asked to be observers in 1849 that most applicants were required to defray at least half the cost of the equipment. Neither

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Philips nor George Banks was listed among the observers for 1851 (DNA, RG27, Meteorological Recs., Smithsonian, Lb II; *Senate Misc. Doc. 108*, 32:1, 70-74).

<sup>3</sup> Here and elsewhere, apparently indicating an ellipsis.

<sup>4</sup> Edge of page torn.

<sup>5</sup> George G. Banks (c1816-54), Virginia-born physician and Union Democrat who represented Hinds County at the November 1851 state convention (Table of Delegates, Z1596, Ventrone Papers, Ms-Ar; Jackson *Mississippi*, May 5, 1854).

<sup>6</sup> Postscript in the margin.

## To Anna Davis Smith

3rd April, 1851.

MY DEAR SISTER: I send you a cameo likeness,<sup>1</sup> and hope that to make my peace with you for the failure to present you, on a former occasion, with a daguerrotype. It is set in a breastpin that may be brought very near to you, and that in this manner I may have renewed the happy days of childhood when my sweet sister held me in her arms. During this summer I expect to visit you. In the meantime, accept my love and present me affectionately to all your family. Your brother.

JEFF.

Smith, "Reminiscences," *Confed. Vet.*, 38:179.

Davis' younger daughter. It is still owned by the family (Smith, "Reminiscences," *Confed. Vet.*, 38:179; Strode, *Davis*, 3:533 and frontispiece).

<sup>1</sup> According to Anna Smith's granddaughter, the brooch was inherited by

## From Horatio J. Harris

Vicksburg, April 17th 1851.

DEAR SIR:

I thank you for your letter of yesterday,<sup>1</sup> as a valued evidence of your continuing regard.

I have so little confidence in my own judgment, that I hesitate to give you an expression of my views, as to the course to be pursued with reference to "the Southern question."

The cause of the South, I regard as prostrate, for the present. It is not to be hoped, that the position taken by the Southern states two years ago, can now be maintained. Virginia and Georgia have

lost their ground.<sup>2</sup> the chances are that Mississippi will fol-

blotches not an original

Smithsonian Inst. Archives

RU 7001: Joseph Henry Collection

Box 11: Papers, Incoming & outgoing, 1852-1860

Prof. Henry

My dear Sir,

I supposed it  
peculiar to politicians  
to suffer from the  
gumming of their  
visitors, but I am  
now induced to  
believe the doctors  
are not wholly ex-  
empt.

I met a Russian  
gentleman who claims  
peculiar connexion

with  
his <sup>name</sup> ~~name~~  
and it  
the doc  
more  
the more  
knows a  
and ca  
the m  
apaci  
warm  
had co  
ing at  
did not  
that he  
the time  
meeting



Collection  
outgoing, 1852-1868

with "Mount Pleasant"  
his <sup>name</sup> sounds "Hammill"  
and it is in the name  
the description may  
enable you to surmise  
the error; this gentleman  
has a letter to you  
and comes to attend  
the meeting of the  
association of the  
board, he said he  
had called that morn-  
ing at the Smithsonian  
did not find you, and  
that he could not have  
the time of the first  
meeting. He is an

Millards Hatet,  
and I write to state  
the facts for any one  
connected therewith  
you will know how  
to apply a remedy.  
Truly yrs.

Edmund

25<sup>th</sup> April 1854

mentioned by Davis has not been found. See also Inge to Davis, October 16, 1854, and Appendix I, April 14, 1854.

<sup>4</sup>William Walker (1824-60), Tennessee-born doctor, lawyer, journalist, and, after his move to California, filibuster. In 1853 he led the first of his expeditions, an unsuccessful attempt to establish his rule in the state of Sonora, Mexico, from a base in Baja California. He later invaded and briefly ruled Nicaragua (*DAB*; see also *appl.* Nov. 9, 17, 1853, and Jan. 7, 1854).

<sup>5</sup>Henry P. Watkins (c1819-72), an early settler in Marysville, California, was William Walker's law partner, 1851-52, and chief lieutenant in Walker's abortive expedition to Mexico. Returning to San Francisco late in 1853 to recruit replacements for the many deserters, Watkins was arrested, tried, and found guilty of violating the neutrality laws. In 1857 he again became involved in a filibuster to Sonora, this time under lawyer Henry A. Crabb,

who migrated to California after killing Vicksburg *Sentinel* editor John Jenkins in a duel and who was himself killed in the Mexican venture. Watkins was elected to the California senate in 1858; he died in Oakland (*Bancroft, Works*, 23:598-99; *Scroggs, Filibusters*, 16-17, 41, 52-54, 311).

<sup>8</sup>Davis does not mention but could not have failed to note newspaper accounts of remarks made by Wool and construed to be anti-administration at a dinner tendered Wool and Henry S. Foote at San Francisco late in February, shortly after Wool assumed command (Feb. 17). "The affair," recorded the San Francisco *Daily Evening News* on February 27, "seems to have been intended for, or was at any rate converted into, a demonstration against General Pierce" (Hinton, "Career of Wool," 239-41; *N.Y. Herald*, Mar. 26, 1854; see also *appl.*, Feb. 28, 1854).

## To Joseph Henry

25th April 1854

MY DEAR SIR,

I supposed it peculiar to politicians to suffer from the grumbling of their visitors, but I am now induced to believe the savants are not wholly exempt.

I met a Russian gentleman who claims peculiar connexion with "Mount Blanc" his /name/ sounds "Hammel"<sup>1</sup> and if I err in the name the description may enable you to correct the error; this gentleman bears a letter to you and comes to attend the meeting of the association of the learned, he said he had called this morning at the Smithsonian did not find you, and that he could not learn the time of the first meeting.<sup>2</sup> He is at Willards Hotel,<sup>3</sup> and I write to state the facts for any evil connected therewith you will know how to apply a remedy. Truly yrs.

JEFFN,, DAVIS

ALS (Henry Papers, DSI).

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Hamel (1788-1862), a Russian astronomer, inventor, and representative of the Imperial Academy of Sciences at St.

Petersburg, was elected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science at the 1854 meeting, where he delivered a paper. Hamel spent much of his life in England, inventing, writing, and teach-



25 APRIL 1854

ing (Kohlstedt, *Formation of Am. Scientific Community*, app.; AAAS *Proceedings*, 8:lv, 258-71).

<sup>2</sup>The eighth session of the American Association for the Advancement of Science convened at the Smithsonian Institution on April 26 and held meetings every day except Saturday until May 3. As approved in the incorporation of the Smithsonian Institution in 1846, the president, the cabinet, the commissioner of patents, and the mayor of Washington were to constitute the Establishment, the body charged with supervising the institution and advising the regents. As such, Davis was among those invited to attend events at the Smithsonian; there is no record of his presence at the sessions, but he entertained the association members at his home on Thursday, April 27 (AAAS *Proceedings*, 8:303-304;

*Smithsonian Institution*, 59-60; V. Davis to Margaret K. Howell, Apr. 29, 1854, Davis Coll., AU; appI, May 17, 1853, Apr. 26, 1854).

<sup>3</sup>The Willard Hotel, which had operated under various names since 1818, first attained acclaim when Henry A. Willard, a Vermonter, was put in charge in 1847. Completely renovated in 1853, the Willard (commonly called "Willard's") became the "unofficial headquarters of the Pierce administration," and during the Civil War enjoyed a preeminence never again achieved, even though the old building was razed and a splendid new hotel built in the twentieth century. The Willard Hotel was closed in 1968 (Montgomery, "Willard Hotels," *Columbia Hist. Soc. Recs.*, 66-68: 277-93).

To John C. Casey<sup>1</sup>

Copy

War Department Washington May 10. 1854

SIR

Believing that the time for negotiating with the Florida Indians is past, and that coercive measures only will induce them to emigrate, I have to direct that you will hold no more "talks" with them, but give your attention to putting a stop to their trade and preventing them from obtaining supplies of any Kind from the whites. In the mean time the Department of the Interior will be requested to take measures for the sale of the lands heretofore withheld from settlement, as rapidly as they may be demanded by settlers. The privations consequent upon the cessation of their trade with the whites, and the gradual contraction of their limits by the advance of the white settlements, may possibly induce some of the Indians to accept the terms heretofore offered, but in any event will place the Department in a better position to apply force whenever the season and other circumstances will permit of its so doing in order to effect their removal.<sup>2</sup> Very respectfully Your obt Serv.

JEFF DAVIS  
Sec of War



National Archives

RG 107 Records of the Office of the Secretary of War

Letters Received (entry 33)

Vol 87 / File # H342

Smithsonian Institution.  
December 8. 1856.

To the

Hon. Jefferson Davis,  
Secretary of War.  
Dear Sir:

It is an evidence of the great interest which is felt by men of sciences as to the specimens of natural history, & particularly of organic remains which are to be found in the country at the head of the Missouri, I take the liberty of enclosing a copy of a communication from Dr. Leidy, Professor of Anatomy in the University of Pennsylvania.

In answer to this letter I have informed the writer that in the present state of the finances of the Institution, the appropriation could not be granted, but that possibly a more thorough exploration of the country would hereafter be made in some expedition fitted out by the War Department, which perhaps may be rendered necessary by the present state of Indian affairs.

By a reference to the accompanying extract from the Smithsonian Report for 1855 it will be seen that a small appropriation was made from the funds of the Institution for explorations in this region the results of which were materials of great interest.

Lieut Warren has lately returned laden with  
many valuable collections from the same locality. But all  
these but increase the desire that a still more full exami-  
nation may be made of this rare deposit of the remains  
of the ancient inhabitants of our globe.

I am encouraged to address you on this subject  
in consideration of the valuable additions which have been  
made to our knowledge of the physical geography and  
natural history of the western part of our public domain by  
the officers of the army under your direction, and tho' this  
knowledge may have served to dissipate much of the ro-  
mance connected with these regions, it will be of the high-  
est importance in furnishing data for rational legislation  
in reference to them.

I have the honor to remain

Very respectfully

Your obedient servant

Joseph M. Henry  
Secretary S. I.

San Francisco Aust. Archives  
Ru 7001: Joseph Henry Jellicott  
Box 14: Desk Diaries, 1865 diary

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 1865.

Called on the President who expressed much sympathy on account of the accident. - gave his consent to the Secretary was to assist the ship in putting on a temporary roof.

Received a dispatch or order from the Secretary of War directing Col. Alexander to render us every assistance not incompatible with his duty to the service. Described the best form of temporary roof, concluded to adopt the one shown in the sketch which will not interfere with the putting on of a new roof.



The work was entrusted to the clerk of the former construction of the Palace of Justice.

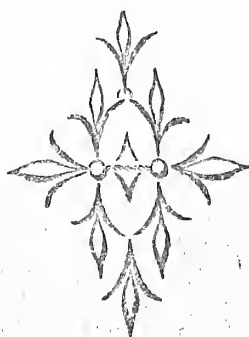
A gang of <sup>Indians</sup> ~~Indians~~ was employed to clear away the debris. The weather was intensely cold.



# JOSEPH HENRY

*His Life & Work*

By THOMAS COULSON



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

1950



in Africa. The rulers might be the half-breeds which we could consistently furnish for many years to come.

I do not think the negro can ever exist in close approximation with the white man except in a state of slavery. The struggle of life must be most severe at the lowest point of the scale and the negro has neither the mental nor physical power in our climate, to stay long in the contest.

He was now sixty, beyond the age which experiences the uplift of the spirit traditionally associated with battle. He was of the age which sees in war the shattering of the house of life which one has built for oneself, and the despair of building another. It is a dangerous age for war, an age in which one too readily sinks into acquiescence of the tragedy, without hope or philosophy. Yet he was at first inclined to sympathize with the South in aspirations which could only lead to warlike action.

Much as one might like to think he had the discernment to perceive the elements of greatness and righteousness in President Lincoln, it must be confessed that it was not until he came under the influence of that great leader's personality that he began to see the truth.

Henry invited his old friend Torrey to visit Washington in order to hear Lincoln's inaugural address. On his arrival, Torrey found that a Mr. and Mrs. Bell, ardent Southern sympathizers, were also guests in the Henry apartment, and it was apparent that their strong feelings were reflected by their hosts. In a letter to Asa Gray, Torrey described Professor and Mrs. Henry as being bitterly opposed to the new President.<sup>1</sup>

However, after meeting Lincoln, Henry's views underwent a change.

In 1862 a visit to L. E. Chittenden, Register of the Treasury, on official business led to a meeting which enabled Lincoln and Henry to express their views on each other's character. When their business, which had to do with the work of the Light-house Board, was completed, Chittenden and Henry fell to talking about the President. Henry was asked for his opinion on Lincoln. He confessed that his admiration increased as their acquaintance developed. "I have lately met him five or six times. He is producing a powerful impression upon me. It increases with every interview. I think it my duty to take

<sup>1</sup> Rodgers, *Torrey*, p. 272.

philosophic views of men and things, but the President upsets me. If I did not resist the inclination, I might even fall in love with him."

When Chittenden expressed agreement with this sentiment, Henry was encouraged to enlarge upon his view.

President Lincoln impresses me as a man whose honesty of purpose is transparent, who has no mental reservations, who may be said to wear his heart on his sleeve. He has been called coarse. In my interviews with him he conversed with apparent freedom, and without a trace of coarseness. He has been called ignorant. He has shown a comprehensive grasp of every subject on which he has conversed with me. His views of the present situation are somewhat novel, but seem to me unanswerable. He has read many books and remembers their contents better than I do. He is associated with men who I know are great. He impresses me as their equal, if not their superior. I desired to induce him to understand and look favorably upon a change which I wished to make in the policy of the Light House Board in a matter requiring some scientific knowledge. He professed his ignorance, or rather he ridiculed his knowledge of it, and yet he discussed it intelligently.

Henry had not finished expressing his views but, when he had arrived at this point, the door was thrown open and the President was announced.

"You have just interrupted an interesting commentary," Chittenden laughingly observed as he rose to meet his visitor.

"Do not! You will not say another word," Henry blushed in confusion. "You will mortify me excessively if you do."

Lincoln and Henry then engaged in a long discussion upon the difficulties encountered by Union vessels navigating in waters from which the Confederates had removed all lights and buoys. The latest stage of the scientist's experiments on behalf of the Light House Board had to be described. Then, when Henry had apologized for consuming so much of the President's time and had left the room, Chittenden seized the opportunity to inquire what Lincoln thought of the other man.

"I had the impression the Smithsonian was printing a great amount of useless information," Lincoln answered. "Professor Henry has convinced me of my error. It must be a grand school if it profits as such."

made him acutely sensitive about its political associations. He was suspicious of some individuals and organizations applying for use of the lecture hall. He was fully aware that some requests were made for the use of this hall with no other purpose in view but to create the false impression that the Smithsonian was giving its benediction to the purpose of the meeting.

With reluctance, he had given permission for the use of the hall for a series of lectures upon the anti-slavery movement. The speakers were men of the highest reputation, like Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Greeley, and Wendell Phillips. But after breathing the Washington atmosphere for fifteen years, Henry was only too well aware that the anti-slavery movement was far from popular with a strong faction. When it was apparent to him that the Smithsonian might incur some of the animosity of the pro-slavers by permitting its platform to be used by their opponents, his native caution induced him to attempt to divert ill-will from the neutral institution. He insisted, therefore, that each lecture be prefaced by an announcement read by the chairman excluding the Smithsonian from association with the ideas advanced by the speakers.

It was an unwise exercise of caution.

When the chairman read the disclaimer: "Ladies and gentlemen, I am requested by Professor Henry to announce that the Smithsonian Institution is not in any way responsible for this course of lectures," he usually followed with the further comment, "I do so with pleasure, and desire to add that the Washington Lecture Association is in no way responsible for the Smithsonian Institution."

The supplementary announcement never failed to provoke an outburst of laughter among the audience, some of whom must have been aware of Henry's intimacy with Jefferson Davis before the war. Most of the audience probably failed to understand that the unhumorous Henry stood for something above party, or even above nationality.

Accompanied by Welles, Chase, and Bates of his cabinet, Lincoln attended one of these lectures to hear Horace Greeley. The customary gale of laughter greeted the reading of the disclaimer of responsibility. Lincoln chuckled with delight. Later, on visiting Henry in his apartment, the President said, "The laugh was rather on you, Henry."<sup>2</sup>

Henry must have admitted ruefully that the President was right. Laughter can be a dangerous weapon. He was not made the butt of

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Sandburg's *Abraham Lincoln: the war years*. Vol. I, p. 401.



another joke of this kind, for he never again permitted the use of the lecture hall for anything but a scientific purpose.

The towers of the Smithsonian Institution were occasionally used for testing visual signalling for the army, and when these tests were made at night, the President observed the results. The flashing of lights on the towers caused a certain amount of uneasiness among citizens who were not in the secret. In the fall of 1861, Lincoln was visited by a caller who declined to be rebuffed when told that the President was engaged with another visitor. Urging that he came upon an errand of national importance, the caller was admitted.

On entering the room where the President awaited his coming, the visitor was embarrassed to find that the chief of state was not alone. Observing the visitor's hesitation to speak, Lincoln encouraged him to proceed with the utmost freedom, as the other gentleman enjoyed his confidence.

The stranger then unfolded his story. On several occasions he had observed a light being displayed on one of the towers of the Smithsonian building for a few minutes immediately after nine o'clock. The light moved in such mysterious fashion that the observer concluded that someone within the building was flashing messages to the rebels occupying Munson's Hill.

Lincoln listened to the recital with a grave face. When it was ended, he turned to his companion with the question:

"What do you have to say to that, Professor Henry?"

Henry explained to the visitor that at nine o'clock each night it was the duty of one of his assistants to read the meteorological instruments set out on the roof of that particular tower and, as no other form of illumination had been provided, the official was compelled to carry a lighted lantern.

The abashed visitor would have fled in confusion had he not been restrained by both Lincoln's and Henry's praise for the conscientious manner in which he had discharged his duty in protecting the security of the capital. He departed with a feeling of satisfaction rather than humiliation.

After he had gone, Lincoln made no effort to maintain his gravity. It is not recorded whether Henry saw the humor in the situation.

In 1865 a defective flue caused a fire to break out which destroyed the roof and all the interior of the upper story of the main portion of the Smithsonian building, the interior of the two north towers, and also



the larger south room. The personal effects of James Smithson were almost totally lost, a valuable collection of paintings of Indians by J. M. Stanley was destroyed, but worst of all, Henry's correspondence, notes, and manuscripts were burned.

This was a cruel blow. Precious links with the past, mementoes of friendship with men who were dead and gone, all the memoranda of work done and that awaiting accomplishment, had vanished in a swirl of flame and smoke. The loss is the despair of Henry's biographers, since it draws a barrier across many passages of his life. However, Henry accepted it with calm submissiveness. "A few years ago, such a calamity would have paralyzed me for future effort," he confided to Torrey, "but in my present view of life I take it as the dispensation of a kind and wise providence, and trust that it will work to my spiritual advantage." The tone of this comment on the loss of his manuscripts, letters, and records would indicate that Henry had reached the mellow age when the mind is less sensitive to material gain and loss.

Sad though the loss of his possessions might be, it shrank into insignificance alongside the loss he suffered in the death of his only son, William Alexander. This young life had been charged with high promise during the young man's residence at Princeton. Other bereavements were to follow which must have left Henry a lonely man, in spite of his great circle of friends and acquaintances. The swift blow which struck down President Lincoln deprived him of a true friend. Close relations between the two had grown rapidly for, while they had different origins and backgrounds of education and training, both were self-made men, and neither lacked ardor in friendship.

The inventor streak in Lincoln caused him to take an interest in many of the scientific ideas advanced by practical men. He had a natural curiosity which made him desire to know the physical law or mechanical principle underlying a phenomenon that came under his notice. When he could not find the answer without assistance he would submit his problem to Henry. Little by little the acquaintance grew with the increasing frequency of Lincoln's visits or with Henry's calls at the White House as he became more deeply enlisted in the government's service.

Shortly after the close of the war Henry lost his dearest and closest friend outside his family, Alexander Dallas Bache. No man could have asked for a worthier friend than Henry found in Bache. The

friendship had grown into close intimacy while Henry was at Princeton and Bache, great-grandson of Benjamin Franklin, was Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. It had been joyfully renewed when Henry moved to Washington, where Bache was already established as head of the Coast Survey. It was Bache who persuaded his friend to forsake Princeton and the work of an experimental physicist in order to accept the position at the Smithsonian. As an original member of the Board of Regents, he had been a constant support and an unfailing friend during the time of Henry's most arduous labors and most acute anxieties.

Bache was not only a man of great personal charm and moral integrity; his scholarship was almost flawless, his industry unflagging. Added to these qualities was an astonishing success as a man of affairs. One is entitled to doubt whether Washington had his equal in sagacity in the conduct of affairs during the years of his residence, and we may assume that Henry had the full benefit of his knowledge of men.

Although the two men were within easy reach of one another while in the capital, they kept up a steady correspondence to supplement their conversations. After Bache's death, Henry and his wife remained the principal confidants and closest friends of his widow.

Other old friends began to pass from his company during these years between the opening of the Civil War and the settlement of its rivalries. Benjamin Silliman had died, full of honor. One who did not reach any high pinnacle of fame, but who enjoyed a close friendship with Henry, was Joseph Saxton.<sup>5</sup> During the period of Saxton's activity they had much in common, and when he was stricken with paralysis, Henry was a comfort to the invalid.

The war years were a turmoil which cast up many men and tore away others from Henry's circle. One of those from whom he expected great things but who failed him sorely was George Gordon Meade. For more than a decade Henry had received proofs that Captain Meade possessed unusual scientific qualifications, for the young engineer officer had been attached to the Light House Board. Later he was placed in charge of the Great Lakes Survey, where his talents had a wider field for exercise.

When Meade agitated to be placed on active duty immediately on

<sup>5</sup> Saxton, whom Henry met at The Franklin Institute, was the friend of many scientists in England and America. An instrument maker of exceptional talent, he is known for his invention of the reflecting pyrometer and his construction of standard balances used in the annual assays at the Philadelphia Mint.

## JOSEPH HENRY, THE MAN

But Henry was not so tolerant toward spiritualists, to whom he was introduced by Lincoln. The President was no believer in the new craze, but the war had raised emotions to such a pitch that many became believers in the supernatural. Its influence reached the White House through Mrs. Lincoln, who became the victim of one of the imposters who claimed to receive messages from the dead. She eagerly sought the solace of anyone who could communicate with her son Willie, who had recently died.

Mrs. Lincoln enlisted the aid of a medium who had adopted the name of Colchester. This young rascal became a privileged visitor at the White House and succeeded in making an impression upon the President with some of his tricks. Although Henry shrank from contact with these impostors, of whose deceit he was convinced in advance, he could not refuse Lincoln's request to receive the medium and witness a demonstration of his powers. A meeting was arranged in Henry's office in the Smithsonian. Here the medium tried to impress the scientist by creating various sounds which he declared sprang from different indicated corners of the room.

Henry did not respond sympathetically. After having trained his ear to detect and to measure sounds in several score of experiments while testing the acoustic properties of rooms, he was not an easy man to deceive in this respect. However, he gave the medium a patient hearing, obediently turning his head this way and that to listen when sounds were alleged to originate in certain parts of the room. When he had satisfied himself upon the location of the sounds, he brought the private seance to an end by informing the medium: "I do not know how you make these sounds, but this I perceive very clearly—they do not come from the room but from your person."

The medium loftily protested his innocence, but he failed to convince Henry. Doubtless the visitor departed to spread another tale among his followers of scientific prejudice, and so it might have continued to appear had not Henry learned by curious chance how the impostor had produced the sounds.

He was sitting in a railroad coach by a young man who recognized his distinguished fellow-passenger. When they entered the next station, the young man produced a small box and Henry took it as a gift. He opened it and found a small box of matches. This was the impostor's secret. The young man had learned the trick from a friend who had been a member of the same society. The impostor had learned the trick from a friend who had been a member of the same society.







